

## **Exploring citizens attitudes towards data sharing and analytics within the public sector**

### **Summary**

Joining data held by public sector organisations has significant potential to support early intervention and prevent people from reaching crisis.

The Essex Centre for Data Analytics (ecda), recognises that citizens have a voice in deciding how and why we should use data and between March-November 2020 ecda, together with ECC Research and Citizen Insight Team, became the first Office for Data Analytics to explore citizens attitudes towards data sharing and predictive analytics within the public sector.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research provided an important window into citizen attitudes to data sharing enabling us to:

- Understand our publics attitudes and expectations
- Identify any areas of tension
- Explore and test levers for change and possible solutions to identified problems
- Inform future public engagement.

Informed by the research findings ecda has:

- Reviewed and changed core data governance and management practices and policies in line with citizen feedback
- Recruited citizens to Essex's independent Data Ethics Committee, to have a role in holding ecda to account
- Involved citizens in choosing projects for launch in Q3 of 2021 and defining research questions
- Developed a new online platform due for launch in June 2021 dedicated to transparent communication and enabling further collaboration with citizens.
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### **Synopsis**

#### **Leading data discussions**

ecda is one of several Offices for Data Analytics (ODA) that has been operating nationally for more than two years to join data across public sector organisations. ecda's model is unique in that it's a formal partnership between ECC, Police and the University of Essex, operating across organisational boundaries, united in their ambition to unlock the significant potential of data.

This is the first piece of research by an ODA to explore citizen attitudes towards data sharing and the learning will be shared nationally with our peer organisations to support their work.

#### **Challenging Assumptions**

Until now the public sector has been underconfident in its ability to combat assumed "citizen reluctance" to sharing data.

Our Research objectives were to:

- Understand our publics attitudes and expectations
- Identify any areas of tension
- Explore and test levers for change and possible solutions to identified problems
- Inform future public engagement

The research concluded that **people are relatively open to the idea of data-sharing when it is explained to them but have some concerns that need addressing.**

The citizens that took part in this research clearly articulated the minimum standards and conditions that they expected to be in place to guide data joining and analytics between public sector organisations. This meant that people were generally willing to look for solutions that enabled data joining and analytics to be carried out in a safe and secure way that protected their personal rights.

This research provides valuable new understanding of peoples' beliefs and attitudes towards joining and analysing data, distilled into 10 key findings. It presents a fresh perspective on engaging everyone in a meaningful conversation about data and analytics and highlights the significant opportunity to work with citizens to create roles that enable them to imagine and influence a data ecosystem for public services.

### **Evidence based decision making**

The research informed a set of detailed recommendations that all three partner organisations formerly agreed at Chief Officer level, for delivery by June 2022.

To date ecda has:

- Reviewed and changed core data governance and management practices and policies (within Essex Police & Essex County Council) in line with citizen feedback
- Recruited citizens to Essex's independent Data Ethics Committee, to have a role in holding ecda to account
- Involved citizens in choosing projects for launch in Q3 of 2021 and defining research questions
- Developed a new online platform due for launch in June 2021 dedicated to transparent communication of all ecda work and enabling further collaboration with citizens.

Currently in progress:

- Recruiting citizens to co-create an accessible narrative that explains some of the complex technical processes involved in data sharing
- Collaborating with ethics committee and citizens to draft a Citizen Data Charter
- Publication of all ecda's commercial relationships to meet citizen feedback for greater transparency and reassurance
- Recruitment of citizens for qualitative research for future ecda projects.

A research report, including findings and recommendations has been published online, and has been shared with colleagues across Essex to inform how we work together.

### **What should LARIA members learn from your award entry?**

#### **Investment in research design is an investment in research outcomes**

Our work took place over 8 months because we recognised that investing time in the research design was critical to enabling the highest quality outputs. Our approach included:

- Conducting initial quantitative research to establish some initial considerations to explore through further qualitative research

- Using a deliberative approach that prioritised and dedicated time to bringing non-technical participants on a journey where they could build their understanding of a complex technical subject and which, more significantly, gave them time to reflect and ask questions, build a relationship with other participants and researchers that allowed them to feel comfortable to challenge, express negative opinions and seek clarification where needed, and allowed them space to naturally begin collaborating on ideas and solutions to the challenges they had identified
  - Investing time in designing research materials that presented practical and engaging examples of data sharing and data analytics to bring a complex topic to life in a way that had meaning for participants' and would enable them to relate through their daily activities, express a view based on their personal experiences, and would provide powerful insight on the subject matter.
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- <https://www.essexfuture.org.uk/ecda/action/>